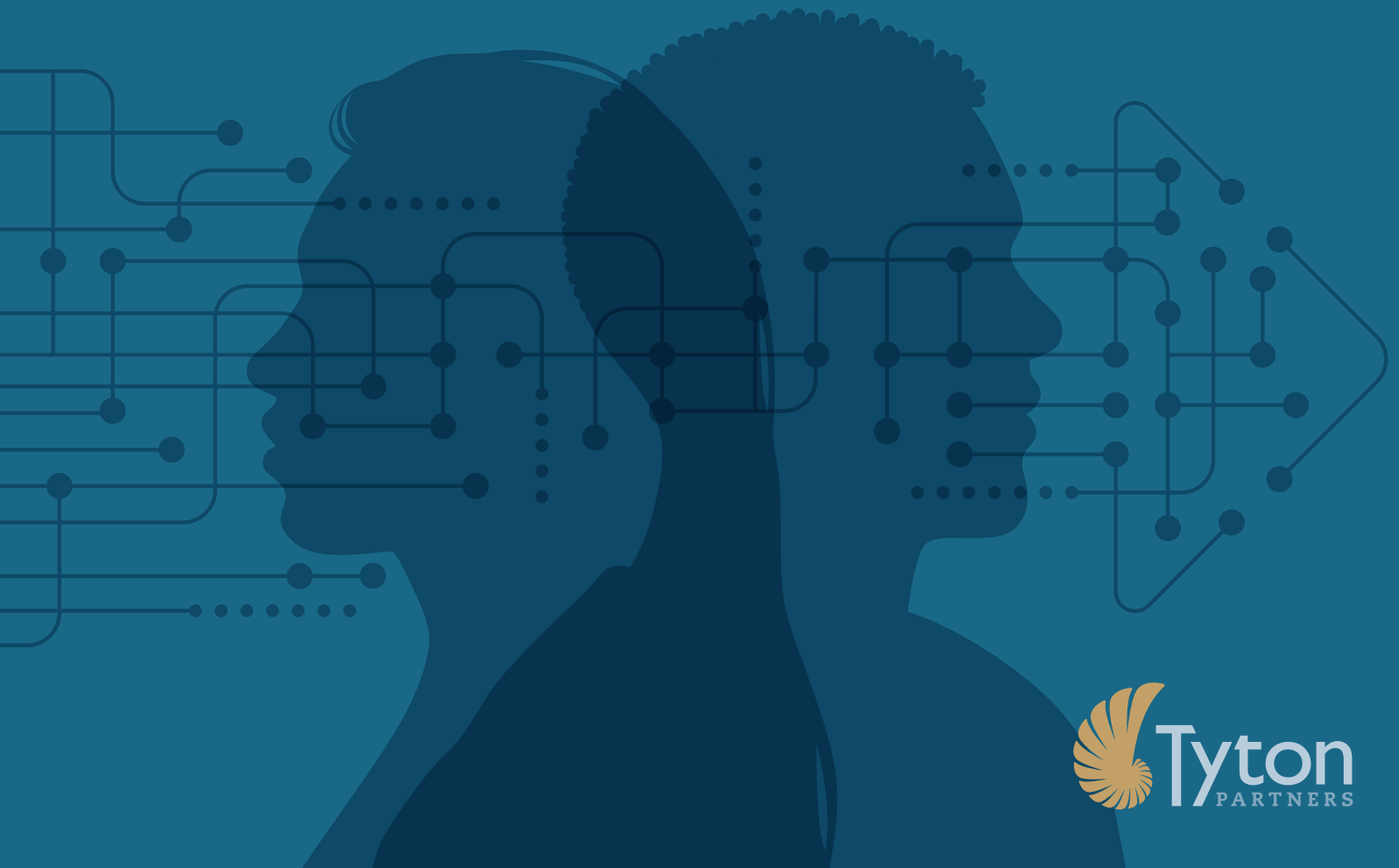


2023

# LISTENING TO LEARNERS

INCREASING BELONGING IN  
AND OUT OF THE CLASSROOM



## OUR PARTNERS

### ANCHOR PARTNERS



### RESEARCH PARTNERS



### STATEMENT OF INDEPENDENCE:

This report and its findings were made possible with the support of our partners. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of Tyton Partners and do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of our partners. The intellectual property contained within this report belongs to Tyton Partners. The raw data from this study is not available to anyone outside of Tyton Partners.

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# BELONGING AND STUDENT SUCCESS

Decades of research have found that there are many factors related to success in post-secondary education. Student belonging stands out as one factor that all institutions can proactively cultivate to improve student outcomes.

The Teaching & Learning Lab at Massachusetts Institute of Technology<sup>1</sup> writes:

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***A sense of belonging is ranked third on Maslow’s hierarchy, behind basic physiological needs and safety. For university students, this need extends to academic belonging, referring to how socially supported and connected students feel – their sense of how they fit into the larger campus community.***

Studies show that belonging impacts several student outcomes, including increased engagement<sup>2</sup>; academic performance including persistence, retention, completion rates<sup>3</sup>; and personal growth and wellbeing<sup>4</sup>. While, no doubt, building a campus community that welcomes and supports all students has a broad impact, the reality of today’s digital and often remote learning environments makes the task easier said than done.

A wide variety of higher education reform efforts – especially post-pandemic – have sought to address barriers to student persistence and success. The goal of Listening to Learners is to put the student experience at the center of these reform conversations by methodically comparing their experiences with that reported by faculty, advisors, and administrators. As part of our longitudinal research on **digital learning** and **student success**, Tyton Partners identified four concrete ways in which institutions can foster student belonging inside the classroom (through teaching and learning) and outside the classroom (through student support services) by working with digital tools and incorporating student preferences.

Learners with a stronger sense of belonging report the following experiences in the classroom:

- Greater frequency of instructors deploying Evidence-Based Teaching practices (such as active learning, also known as “learning by doing”).
- Increased utilization of digital tools designed to create community such as collaboration tools (e.g., Kahoot or Google Jamboard).

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1. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (n.d.). Academic Belonging. Teaching & Learning Lab at MIT. Retrieved July 6, 2023, from [tll.mit.edu/teaching-resources/inclusive-classroom/academic-belonging](https://tll.mit.edu/teaching-resources/inclusive-classroom/academic-belonging)

2. Hurtado, Han, Sáenz, Espinosa, Cabrera, & Cerna. (2007). Predicting transition and adjustment to college: biomedical and behavioral science aspirants’ and minority students’ first year of college. *Research in Higher Education*, 48(7), 841–887. [doi.org/10.1007/s11162-007-9051-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-007-9051-x)

3. Tinto, Vincent. 1993. *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

4. Strayhorn, T.L. (2018). *College Students’ Sense of Belonging: A Key to Educational Success for All Students* (2nd ed.). Routledge. [doi.org/10.4324/9781315297293](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315297293)

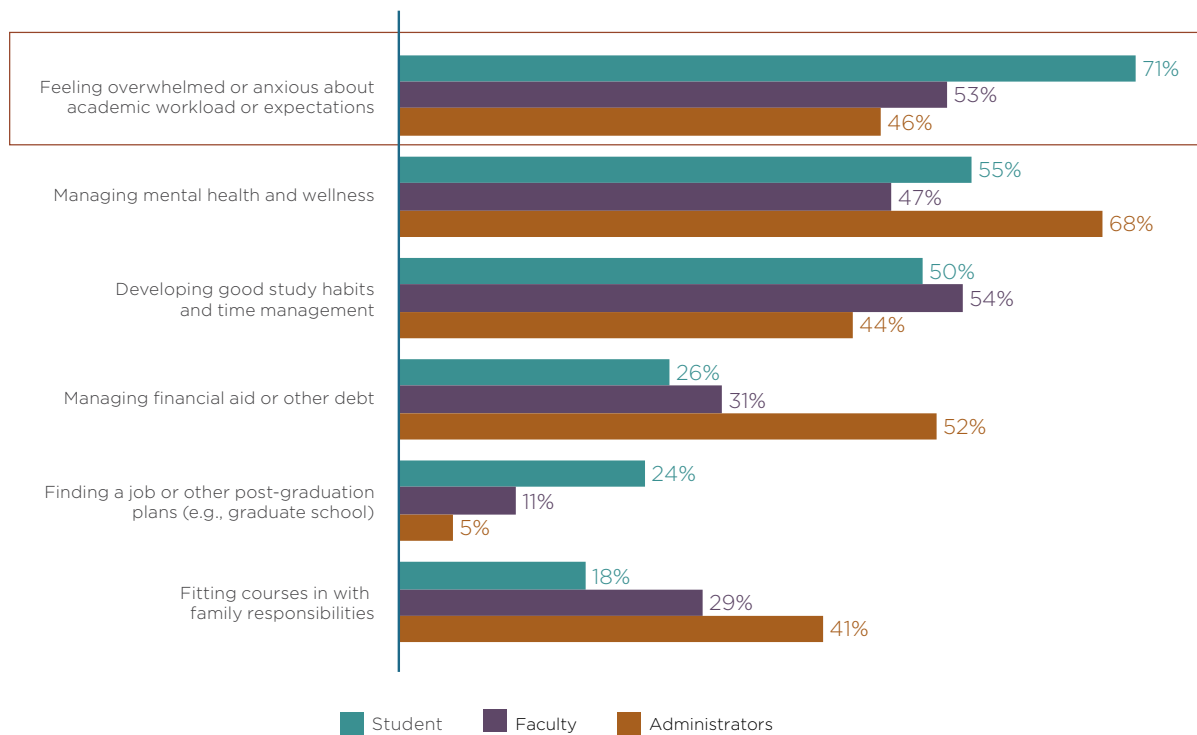
Learners with a stronger sense of belonging report the following experiences outside the classroom:

- Greater awareness and utilization of the breadth of student supports available (out of a list of fourteen commonly available students supports).
- Specific engagement with academic advising, financial aid, and mental health services.

We surveyed 2,056 students at 2- and 4-year public and private institutions in March of 2023 about their experiences related to learning in the classroom and institutional support outside of it. We juxtapose learner perceptions, preferences, and experiences with those of 1,748 instructors, 1,493 frontline support staff (academic advisors and other counselors), and over 500 administrators to identify opportunities to improve in areas where student needs diverge from what institutions perceive.

Academic-related challenges are top-of-mind for students, as shown in Figure 1, where students report that their top challenges are related to managing their workload. However, instructors and administrators are not as cognizant of the extent of this challenge and overemphasize the stress of non-academic challenges such as financial aid and family responsibilities.

*Figure 1:*  
**Top challenges for students according to students, instructors, and administrators**



*Notes: "What do you think were the most pressing challenges for you/students at your institution this past term? Select top three out of 12 options, inclusive of a write-in." Student n=1,558-1,697, faculty n=1,728, administrators n=306; Sources: Time for Class / Driving Toward a Degree 2023 Student Survey, Tyton Partners analysis*

With some many learner challenges, institutional stakeholders have many avenues to explore to support students. Identifying what drives student feelings of belonging in each of the environments where they learn and develop is crucial. Post-COVID-19, as higher education embraces the widespread adoption of a variety of online and hybrid teaching and learning environments, the discussion around creating a sense of belonging must reflect the reality of our modern, digital campuses. Our research is meant to help institutions build an inclusive and supportive campus for all their students, however they may be learning.

# WHAT DRIVES THE LEARNER'S SENSE OF BELONGING IN THE CLASSROOM?

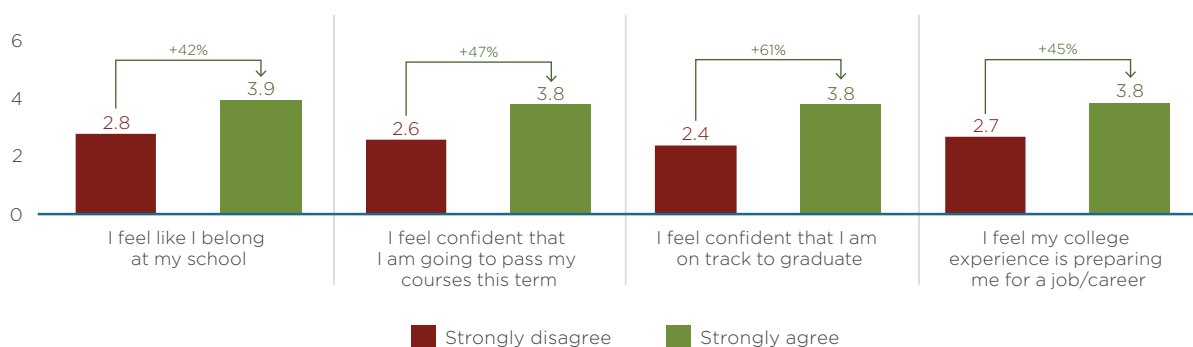
Students and their instructors share the classroom setting, whether in person or online. Our research identified two important ways in which the learning process in the classroom can impact student belonging and, therefore, student outcomes.

## BELONGING AND EVIDENCE-BASED TEACHING PRACTICES

First, students who report that their instructors use more Evidence-based Teaching Practices (EBTs) also report a greater sense of belonging to their institution (see Figure 2). Evidence-based teaching practices are instructional strategies that research has demonstrated is effective for student learning and can be implemented in ways that foreground racial and economic equity.<sup>5,6</sup>

Figure 2:

### Average number of evidence-based teaching practices students report instructors engaging in



Notes: Survey questions: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?", n=1,550, "Don't know / NA" responses are excluded; Which of the following things did your instructor do in this (your largest) course? Select all that apply. All differences are statistically significant, p<.05

Sources: Time for Class survey 2023, Tyton Partners analysis

5. Rodgers, A. and O'Sullivan, P. (2022) An Equity-First Approach to Evidence-Based Teaching Practices. Every Learner Everywhere. [www.everylearnereverywhere.org/resources/an-equity-first-approach-to-evidence-based-teaching-practices](http://www.everylearnereverywhere.org/resources/an-equity-first-approach-to-evidence-based-teaching-practices)

6. See Appendix Figure 31 for language used in student survey to identify EBTs used in courses.

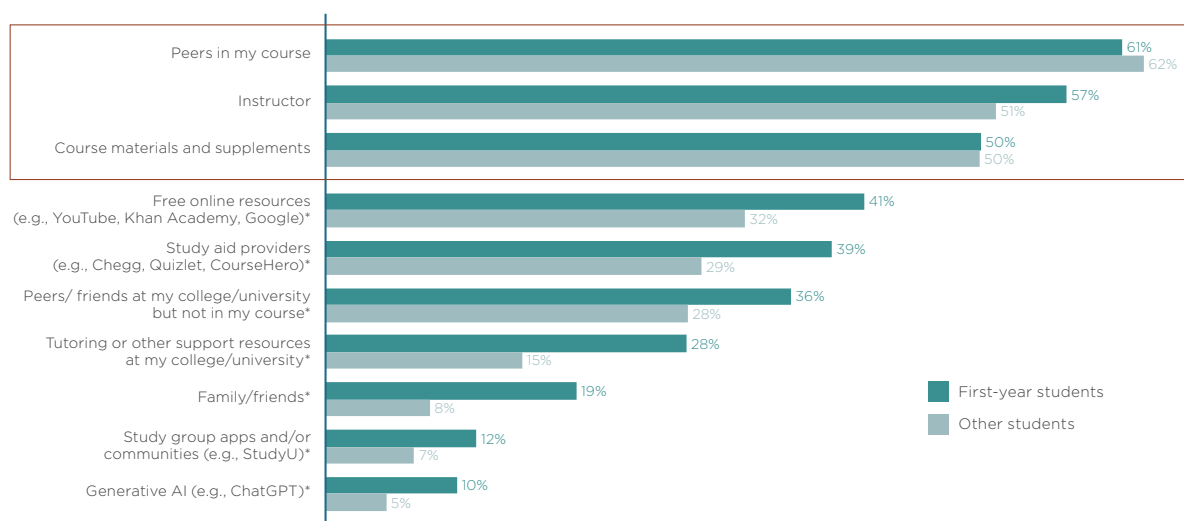
## BELONGING AND DIGITAL TOOLS

Second, when faced with academic challenges, students have choices of where to turn for help. Our research found that digital learning tools can create communities that students can turn to for help, which in turn support belonging.

Figure 3 shows how students prefer to seek coursework help from sources directly tied to the course, such as peers, instructors, and course materials with context. These sources can provide tailored, non-generic support because they understand the exact nature of the assignment or content – something friends, families, generic study materials, or AI tools cannot fully replicate.

Figure 3:

### Top resources students use for help in courses



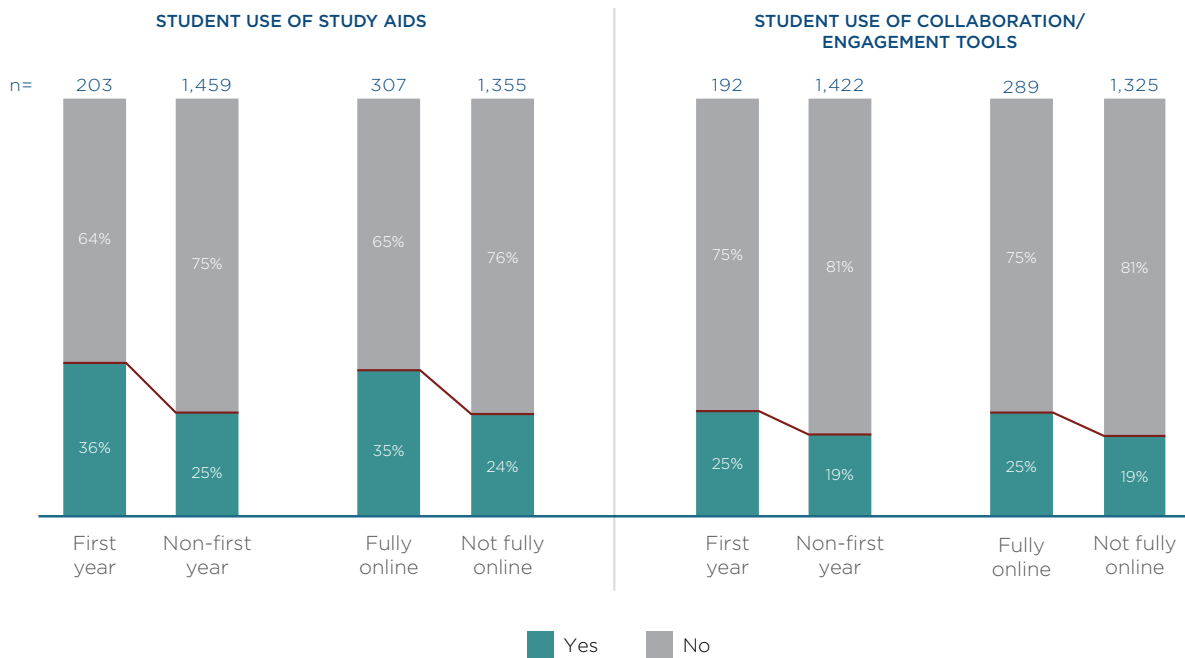
Notes: Survey question: "When you are struggling with a concept in your course, where do you prefer to turn for help?"; First-year student n=307, all other student n=1,749, \*Statistically significant difference,  $p < .05$

Sources: Time for Class 2023 Student Survey, Tyton Partners analysis

The value of community within a course is made clear by looking at which students choose what sources for help. Importantly, students lacking a sense of course community are more likely to use tools that increase course engagement, including collaboration tools and study aids. As Figure 4 shows, first-year and online students tend to leverage generic, non-course-specific resources more often.



Figure 4:  
Community building with study tools



Notes: "Which of the following course materials have you used in your highest enrollment course?" Student n=2,056

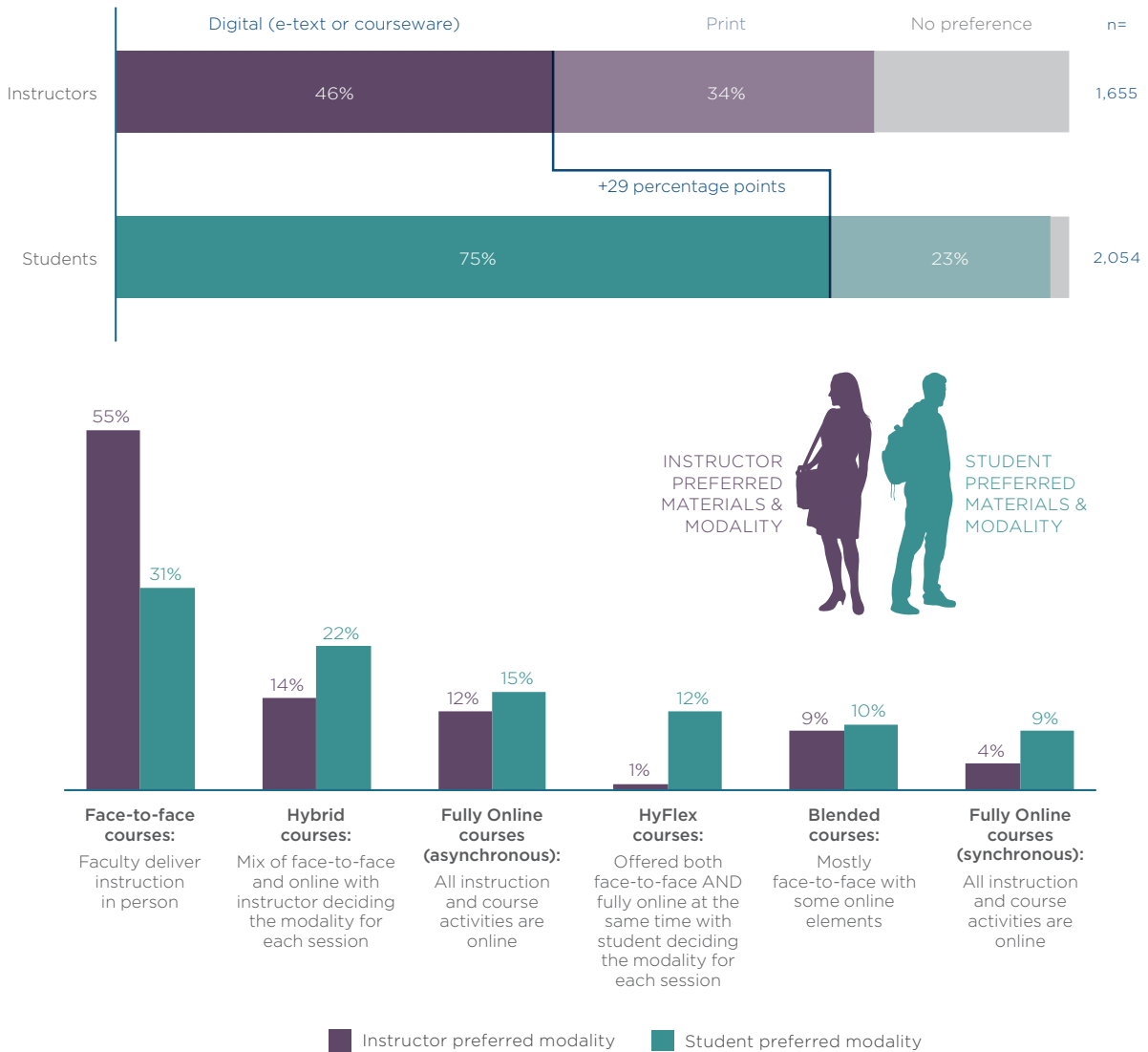
Sources: Time for Class / Driving Toward a Degree 2023 Student Survey, Tyton Partners analysis

While not a replacement for peer-to-peer or student-instructor relationships, digital learning tools can aid in facilitating these connections for students that do not yet have access to supportive networks that have course context. Technology providers have a crucial role in creating a sense of belonging among student communities who may not always interact in person.

Digital learning tools are not new to this generation of digital natives and the students in our study demonstrated a greater preference for digital course materials and flexible, blended learning modalities than faculty, who are more likely to favor print materials and face-to-face modalities.

Figure 5:

### Student and instructor preference for course materials and course modality

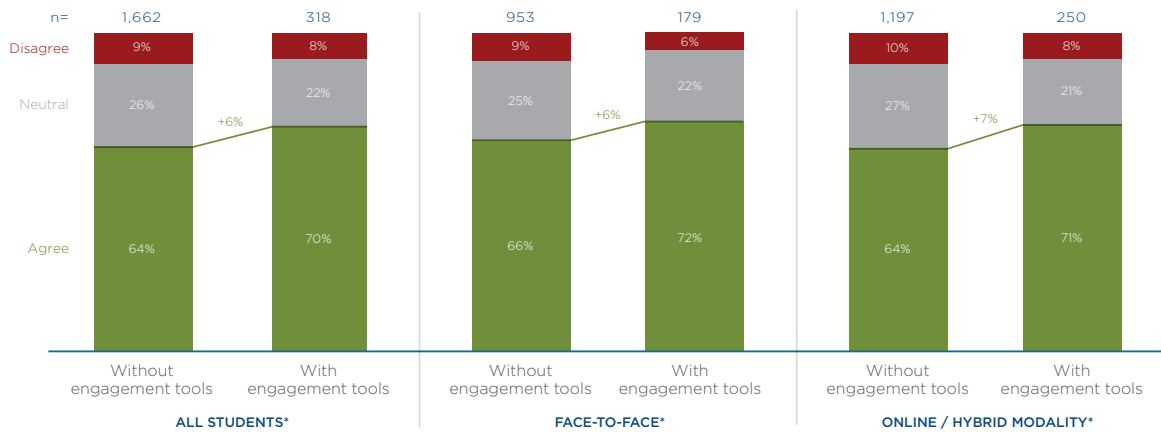


Notes: Survey question: "When you are struggling with a concept in your course, where do you prefer to turn for help?"; First-year student n=307, all other student n=1,749  
 Sources: Time for Class 2023 Student Survey, Tyton Partners analysis

Community and a feeling of belonging is slightly stronger across all learning modalities when students reported using digital engagement or collaboration tools (Figure 6). Adoption should be approached first from a place enabling evidence-backed teaching practices rather than technological capability. For example, an instructor might use an engagement tool to run a simulation and then let students have peer discussions about the experience. This method uses technology to change instructional approaches and enable active learning (a key EBT, especially in online environments) rather than adopting within the confines of the existing course curriculum.

Figure 6:

### Student agreement with “I feel like I belong at my school” by Modality and Use of Digital Engagement Tools



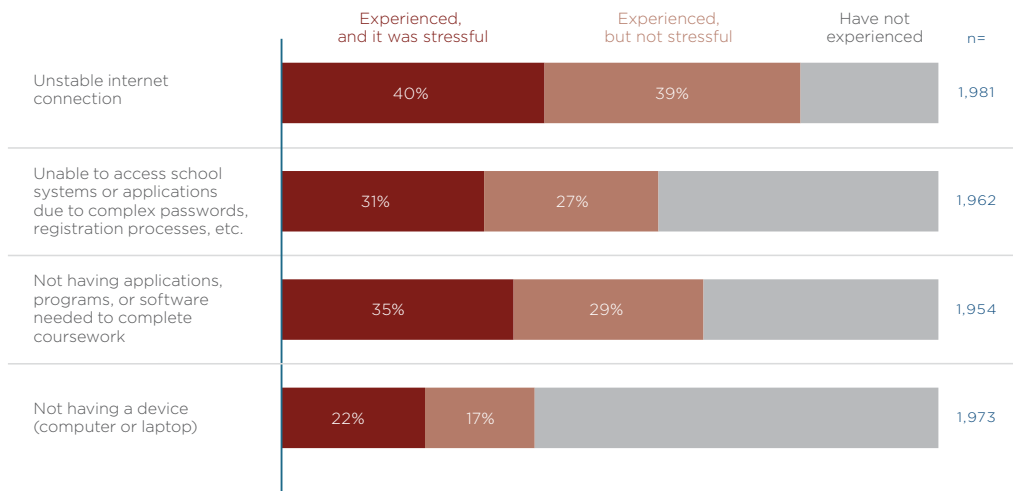
Notes: Student survey questions: “Which of the following course materials have you used in this course? Select all that apply” “This term, I am taking courses \_\_\_\_\_. Select all that apply out of: Face-to-face, Hybrid, blended, HyFlex, Fully Online” “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:” “I feel like I belong at my school” Strongly agree/disagree is combined with agree/disagree; All differences are statistically significant,  $p < .05$

Sources: Time for Class / Driving Toward a Degree 2023 Student Survey, Tyton Partners analysis

At the same time, while these technologies have exciting applications, challenges around access to devices and infrastructure remain a persistent problem. As shown in Figure 7, 79% of students experienced unstable internet in the past year, and 39% of students struggled to find access to a device (computer or laptop) in the past year.

Figure 7:

### Digital learning infrastructure challenges for students



Notes: Survey question: “Please indicate the extent to which you’ve experienced the following technology issues:” Respondents who indicated “Don’t know/NA” excluded

Sources: Time for Class survey 2023, Tyton Partners analysis

Instructors should adopt digital learning practices with these access and infrastructure challenges in mind ensuring their students have the requisite resources to succeed. Also, solution providers should strongly consider mobile-first experiences to give students without a laptop or computer the same quality content that their peers with this equipment access.

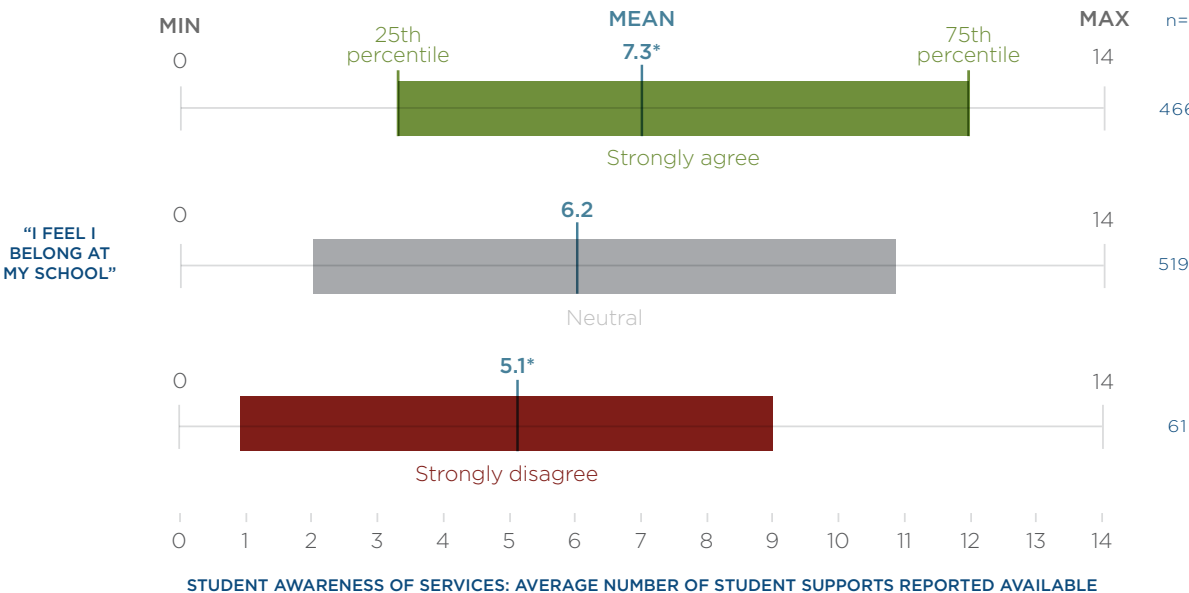
# WHAT DRIVES THE LEARNER’S SENSE OF BELONGING OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM?

## BELONGING, AWARENESS, AND UTILIZATION OF STUDENT SUPPORTS

Classroom learning is not the only driver of success for students. Student support services such as academic advising, financial aid, and mental health services, among others, play a critical role in improving student outcomes by guiding students as they navigate college. Our research finds that increased awareness of student support services is directly associated with higher reported rates of belonging (see Figure 8).

Figure 8:

Student belonging and awareness of support services

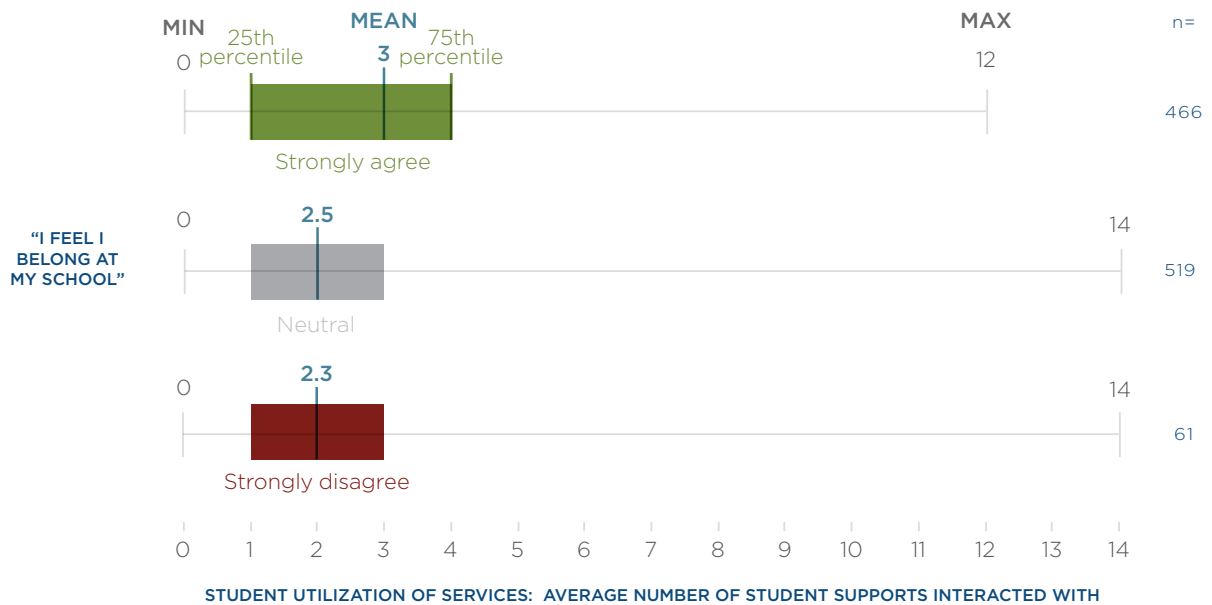


Notes: Survey questions: “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? I feel like I belong at my school”; “Which of the following support services are available to you at your institution? Select all that apply (14 options provided)”, student n = 2,056; \*statistically significant difference at p<.001

Sources: Time for Class / Driving Toward a Degree 2023 Student Survey, Tyton Partners analysis

Furthermore, students who utilize student support services also report an increased sense of belonging at their institution (see Figure 9). As shown below, students who strongly agree that they feel they belong utilized, on average, 3.0 student support services compared to 2.3 among students who do not feel they belong. Given the connection between awareness and utilization of services to belonging, institutions should pay particular attention to student access and awareness as well as which students utilize available services.

Figure 9:  
Student belonging and utilization of student support services



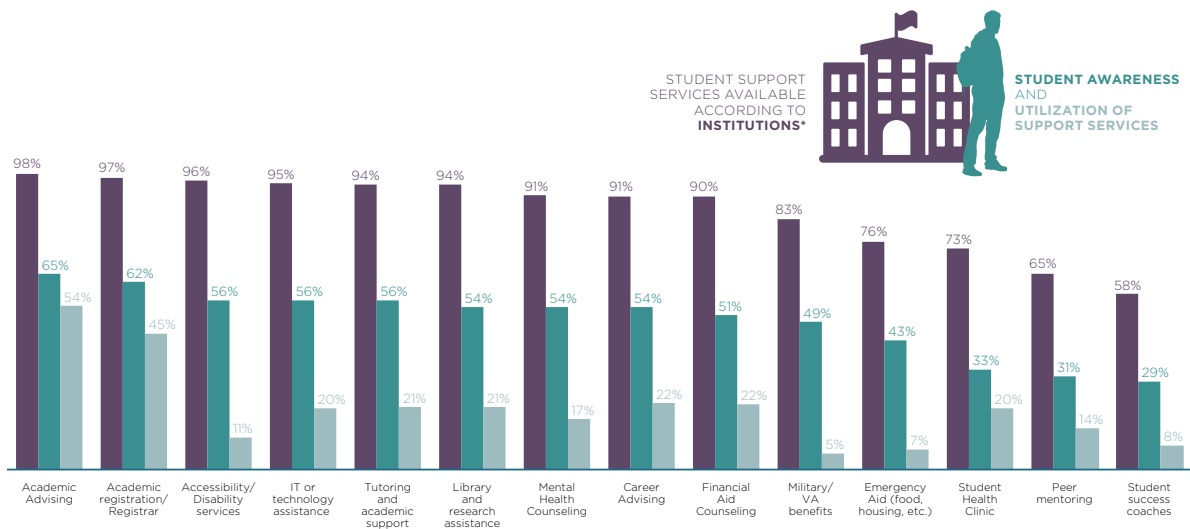
Notes: Survey questions: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? I feel like I belong at my school"; "Which of the following support providers have you ever personally interacted with at your current institution? Select all that apply (14 options provided)", student n = 2,056; \*statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$

Sources: Time for Class / Driving Toward a Degree 2023 Student Survey, Tyton Partners analysis

However, as shown in Figure 10, roughly 50% of students are unaware of most major student services at their institution - including tutoring and academic support, career advising, and financial aid advising - while more than 90% of institutions say that they offer those services. Additionally, as awareness of services is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for utilization of services, student reported usage of available services is much lower than awareness.

Figure 10:

## Student awareness and utilization of available support services



Notes: Survey question: "Which of the following student support services are available to students at your institution? Select all that apply." Administrator/advisor/faculty n=1,756; \*"Which of the following support providers have you ever personally interacted with at your current institution?" Select all that apply, n = 2056"

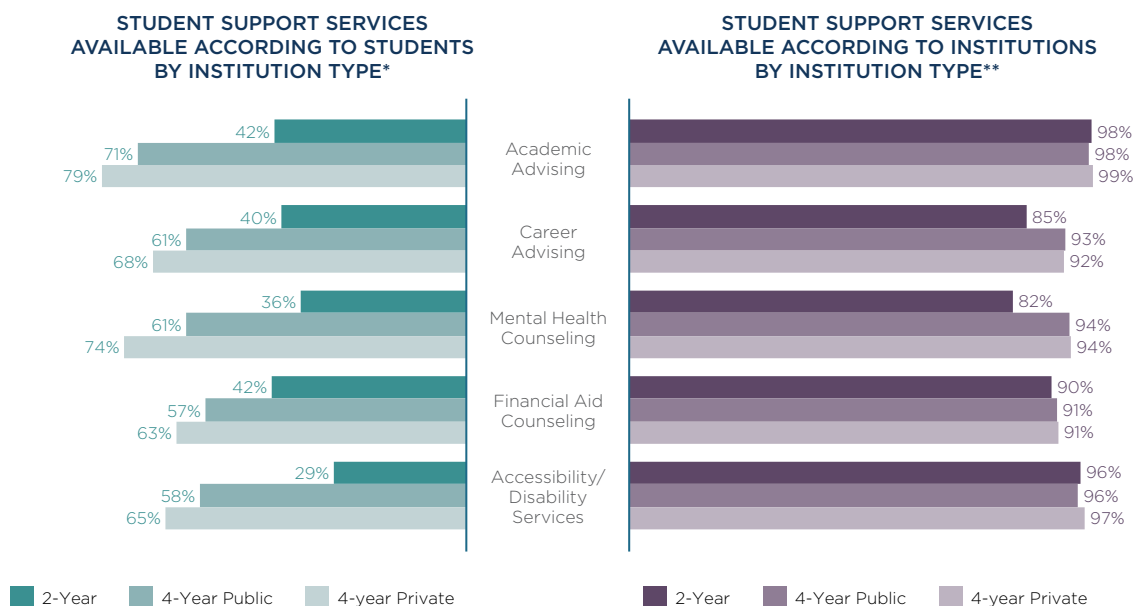
Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2023*, Tyton Partners analysis

As we consider actions moving forward to improve awareness and utilization of student supports, we need to realize that engaging students requires disaggregating the data. A monolithic approach to driving awareness and utilization together will likely not be effective. For instance, when examining community college students and first-generation students, our data demonstrates the need to customize interventions for specific audiences, both in communication channels and messaging.

- Students at 2-year institutions report the lowest levels of awareness of key services (Figure 11) such as academic and career advising despite 2-year institutions reporting similar levels of service availability. Preferences for communication channels also differ greatly between 2-year and 4-year students (Figure 12a and Figure 12b).
- First-generation students report higher levels of awareness of student services, but are less likely to utilize those services when compared to their continuing-generation peers (Figure 12c). Messaging to this group will require encouragement beyond simply informing students of available resources and needs to focus on normalizing seeking help.

Figure 11:

### Selected student support services available according to institutions and students by sector



Notes: Survey questions: “Which of the following support services are available to you at your institution? Select all that apply”, n = 2,056; \*\*\*“Which of the following student support services are available to students at your institution? Select all that apply”, n = 1,756; \*statistically significant difference, p<.05

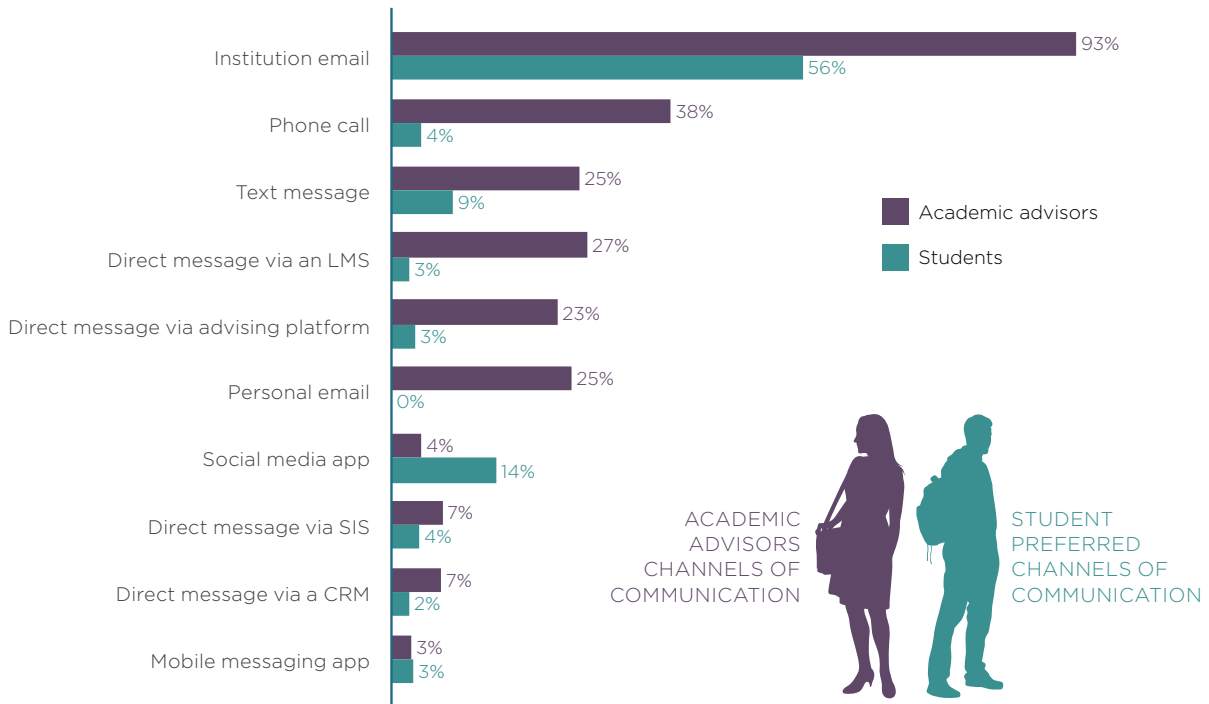
Sources: Time for Class / Driving Toward a Degree Student Survey 2023; Driving Toward a Degree 2023; Tyton Partners analysis

The mismatch in service availability and student awareness points to challenges in institutional communications reaching students. *Driving Toward a Degree 2023* results suggest that institutions are more likely to rely on passive communication such as websites, new student orientation, and handbooks to relay information about available services, while students indicate a preference for emails, text messages, or direct messages via an institutional system. To increase student success outcomes such as belonging, retention, and graduation, institutions should consider how to communicate available resources more proactively to students. This includes targeted, active, and ongoing methods such as in-class announcements, automated alerts, and text/email campaigns.

Advisors attempt to contact students using multiple channels (see Figure 12a), but overwhelmingly report using email as a primary method for communication. However, only 23% of community college students prefer institution email for advisor communications compared to 71% and 62% among four-year publics and four-year privates, respectively.

Figure 12a:

### Communication methods attempted by advisors versus student preferences



Notes: Survey questions: “What are the ways in which you attempt to communicate with students assigned to your caseload? Select all that apply”; Faculty and professional advisor n = 660; Student question: “How would you most prefer to hear from your advisor? Select only one.” n = 1,822

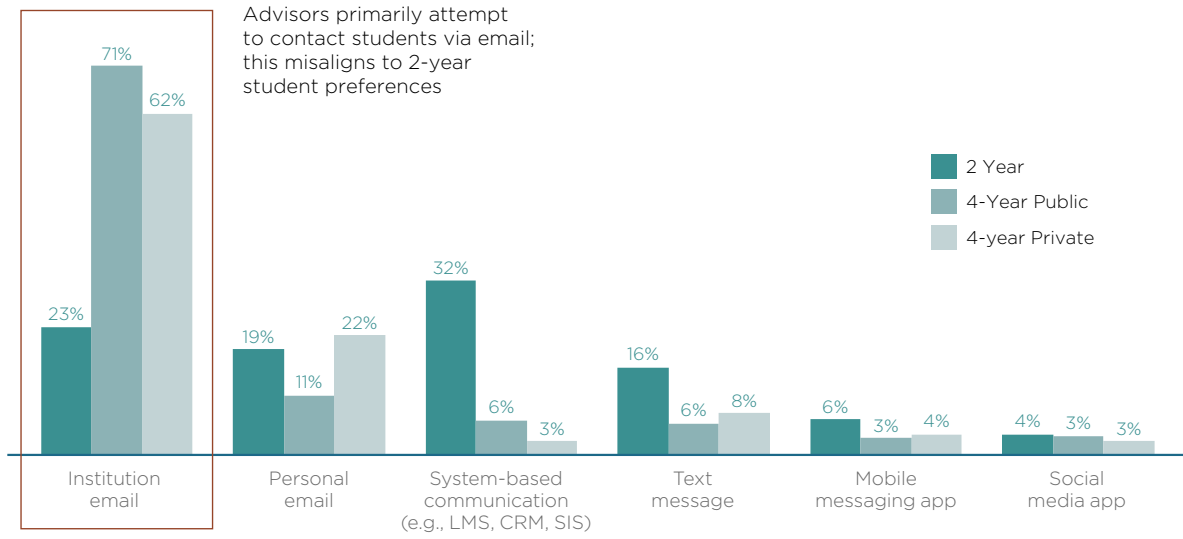
Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Time for Class / Driving Toward a Degree 2023 Student Survey, Tyton Partners analysis*

As seen in Figure 12b, 32% of two-year students indicated they prefer to hear from an advisor via a system-based communication (e.g., LMS, advising platform, CRM), with roughly 20% expressing a preference for text or personal email. Institutional leaders and advisors at two-year institutions should consider a multifaceted approach to student communications that leverages system-based communications and text over institutional email.



Figure 12b:

## Student advising communication preferences by sector



Notes: Survey question: "How would you most prefer to hear from your advisor? Select only one."  $n = 1,822$

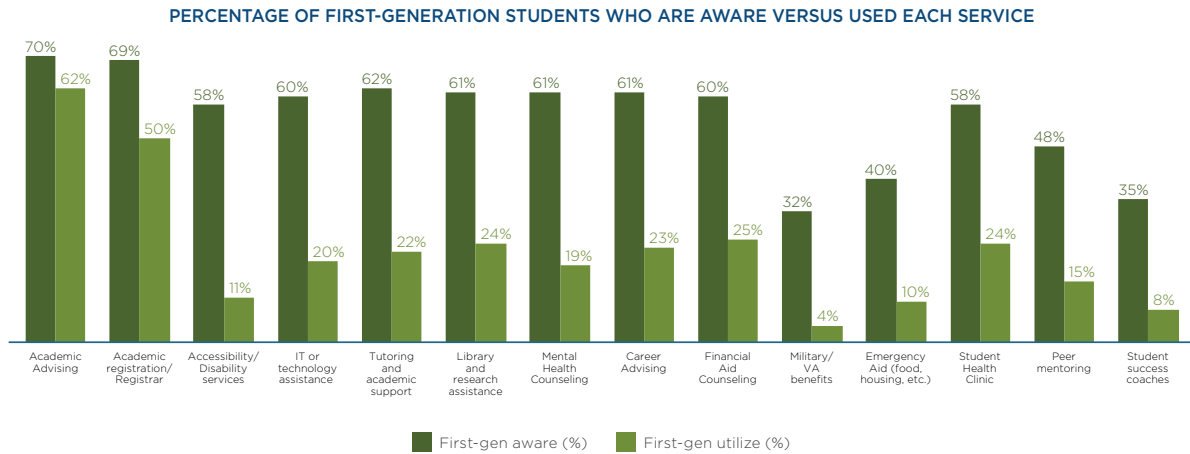
Sources: Time for Class / Driving Toward a Degree 2023 Student Survey, Tyton Partners analysis

As mentioned earlier, besides selecting the best way to reach learners and make them aware of available student support services, the content of the outreach must also be relevant to encourage behavior change. When comparing student data from Figure 10 with the focus on first-generation students in Figure 12c, we observe that even though first-generation students are more likely to be aware of support services than their continuing generation peers, the gap between awareness and utilization of service by first-generation students is larger than that of continuing generation students (with a notable exception in academic advising).

Talking to some first-generation students suggests that their reluctance to seek help might stem from a potential stigma associated with seeking assistance. If persistence and self-reliance got them to college, first-generation students share anecdotally that they hesitate to seek assistance on how to navigate the new environment of college. It is essential to normalize the act of asking for help when addressing this group. Additionally, it is worth recognizing that certain terms, such as "office hours" for tutoring, might not be as welcoming as alternatives like "open tutoring hours" or "student walk-in hours." The term "office" could imply that student visits are burdensome.

Figure 12c:

## Awareness – Utilization Gap in support services for first-generation students

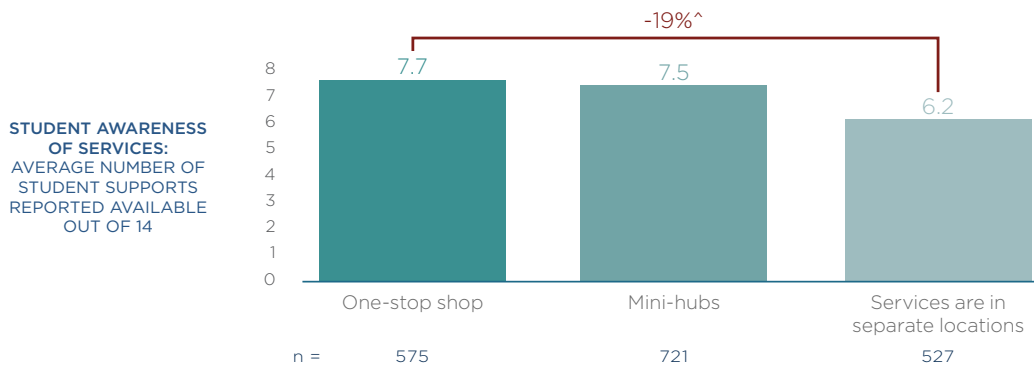


Notes: Survey question: *“Which of the following support services are available to you at your institution? Select all that apply.”* n = 2056; *“Which of the following support services are have you used at your institution? Select all that apply.”*  
 Sources: *Time for Class / Drive to Degree Student Survey 2023, Drive to Degree 2023, Tyton Partners analysis*

Finally, in addition to optimizing channel and messaging to learners to raise awareness and utilization of support services, our research indicates that physical and digital co-location of student support services is associated with higher levels of service awareness among students. Notably, students who identified their institution as physically co-locating services (in one-stop shops or mini-hubs) reported a higher average number of student services available at their institution.

Figure 13:

## Awareness of student supports by organization of support offices

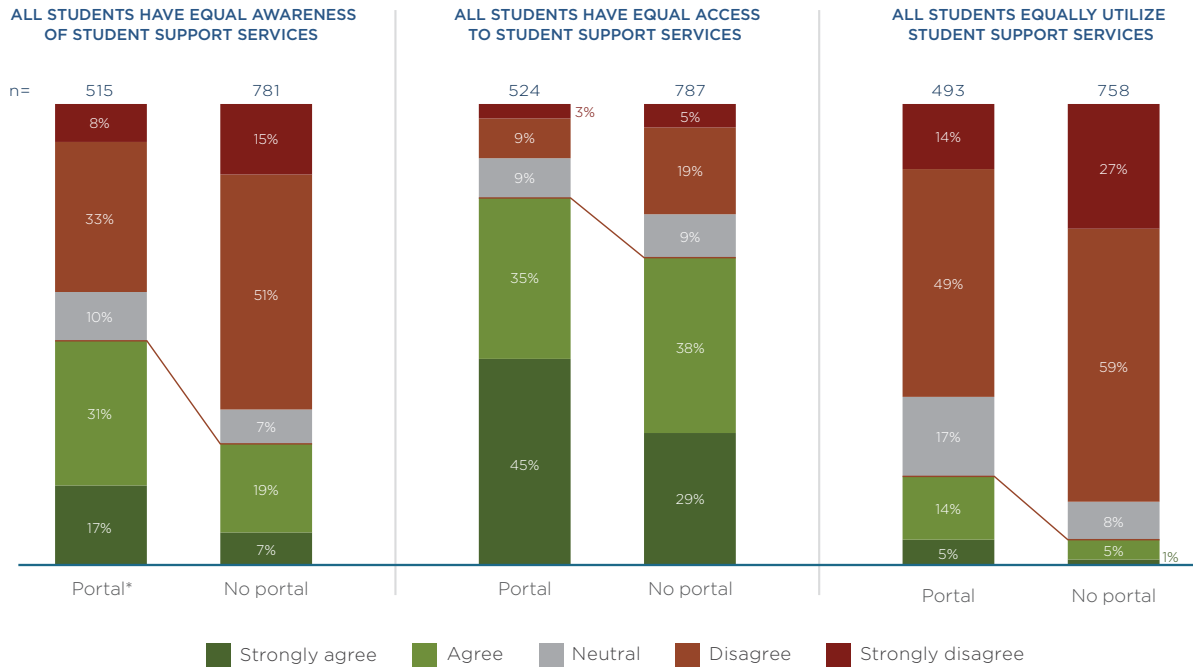


Note: Survey questions: *“Which of the following support services are available to you at your institution? Select all that apply.”* n = 2056 *“How are these student support provider offices arranged on campus?”*; <sup>^</sup>statistically significant difference at p<.01.  
 Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Tyton Partners analysis*

The physical and digital co-location of services supports a holistic advising approach with greater integration and coordination among services. Institutions that co-locate their student services physically or digitally are more likely to report higher levels of student awareness, contributing positively to students’ sense of belonging.

Figure 14:

## Student awareness, access, and utilization of student supports by availability of a digital portal



Notes: Survey questions: “Are the online equivalents of the student support services you selected accessible through a single student support or resource portal?” “Please choose the phrase that best describes your level of agreement with the following statements regarding student supports.” Administrator/advisor/faculty n=1,324

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2023*, Tyton Partners analysis

In conclusion, recognizing the significance of student support awareness and utilization to belonging, several students highlighted their academic advisors as crucial in informing them about other available resources. This aspect of interaction with advisors is essential for offering comprehensive support services. Any institutional effort to enhance awareness and utilization of student supports should consider the involvement of academic advisors (as well as other institutional stakeholders with regular student interactions like faculty) to enhance student engagement with the resources at hand.

### STUDENT QUOTES: WHAT DID YOU LEARN (IF ANYTHING) FROM YOUR ADVISOR?

**“[I have learned from my advisor...] different resources that are available to me”**

– First-year, female student of color, age 35-44 at 2-year institution

**“[I have learned from my advisor...] campus resources that are available to me as a student!”**

– Sophomore, female, student of color at public 4-year institution

*“I learned from my advisor that it is very important, especially in college, that you talk to people. If you don’t talk to people, you will never get the information you need right away.”*

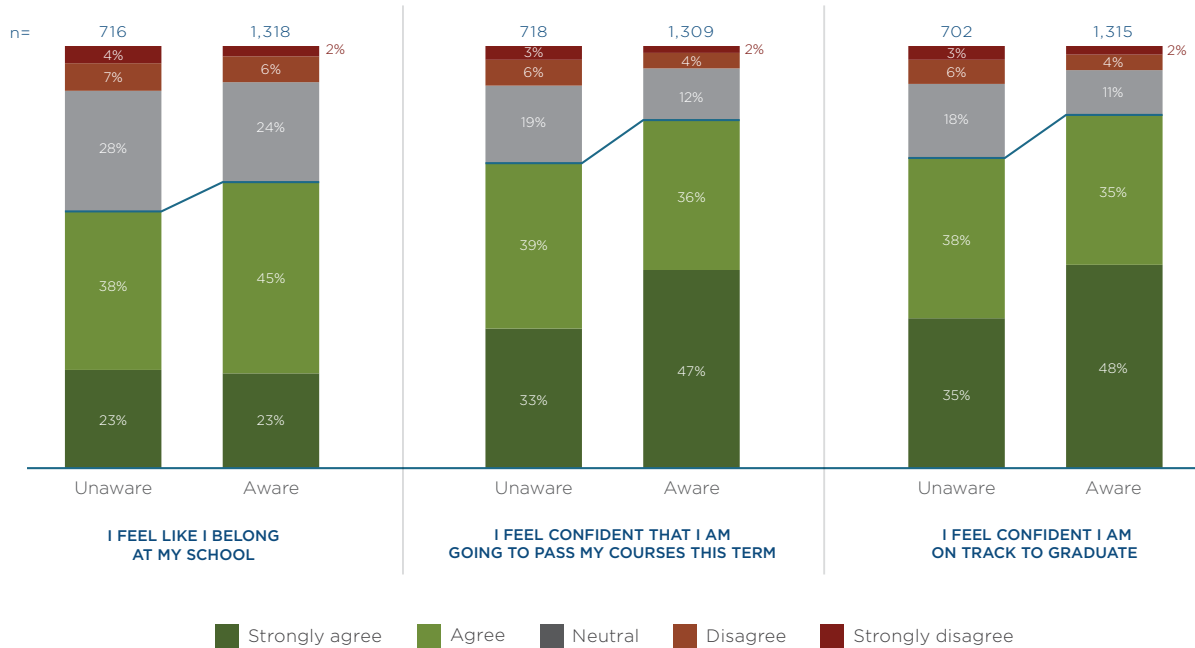
*- Female, computer sciences major attending 2-year institution*

## BELONGING AND ACADEMIC ADVISING

As one of the top student support services that influence students’ retention decisions (Figure 21), academic advising plays a pivotal role in fostering students’ sense of belonging as advisors connect students to institutional resources. Students who report being aware of academic advising also express agreement with a sense of belonging at their school and confidence in academic outcomes (see Figure 15a).

Figure 15a:

### Student belonging and confidence by awareness of academic advising

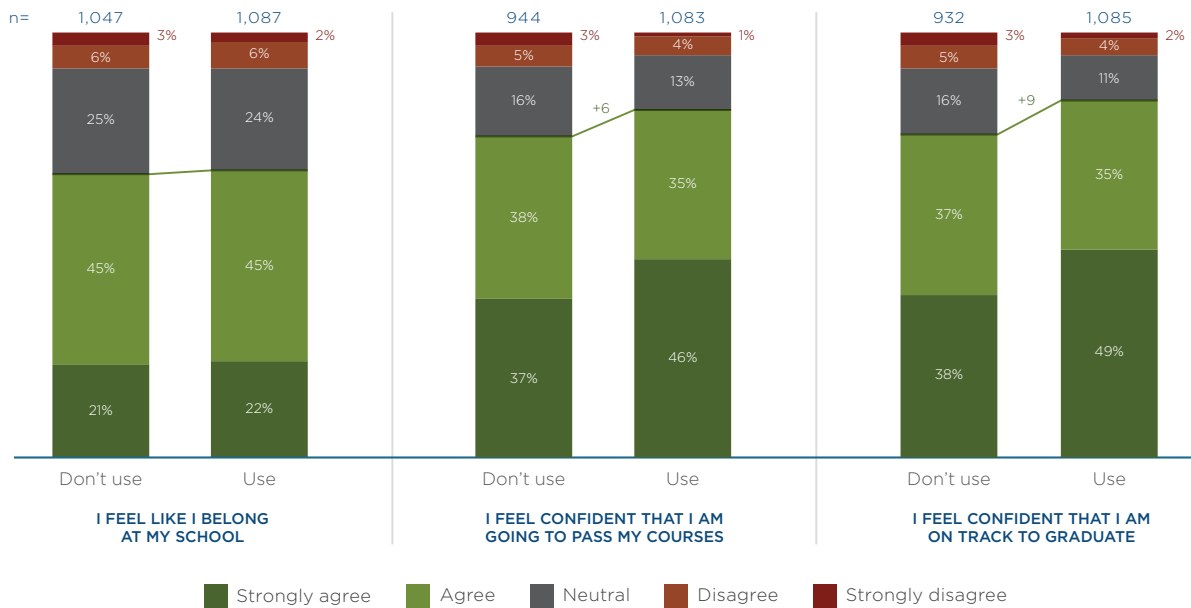


Notes: Survey questions: “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?” “Which of the following support services are available to you at your institution? Select all that apply.” Student n=2,056

Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Tyton Partners analysis

Figure 15b:

### Student belonging and confidence by utilization of academic advising



Notes: Survey questions: *\*\*Which of the following support providers have you ever personally interacted with at your current institution?;* *"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements"*, n = 2056

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Tyton Partners analysis*

Pivoting to usage, in Figure 15b, we hear from students that they value academic advising relationships and that they correlate with increased feelings of confidence in passing courses and tracking towards graduation. According to students, advisors also teach critical life skills that help learners navigate available resources. Though students overwhelmingly used the open-ended question, "What did you learn (if anything) from your advisor?" to discuss how their advisors supported their course selection and helped them navigate course registration, students also pointed to lessons related to self-management, motivation, time management, and general mental well-being.

### STUDENT QUOTES: WHAT DID YOU LEARN (IF ANYTHING) FROM YOUR ADVISOR?

***"[I have learned from my advisor...] to be more compassionate and less hard on myself and truly enjoy the college experience"***

*- Female, Hispanic/Latino, financial-aid recipient attending 4-year private institution*

***"[I have learned from my advisor...] how to do things step by step and not be overwhelmed at finishing everything at once"***

*- Female, Asian, financial-aid recipient attending 4-year public institution*

***"[I have learned from my advisor...] how to enroll for classes, apply for scholarships, test-taking strategies, financial aid deadlines"***

*- Female, Hispanic/Latino 24-year-old attending 2-year institution for health sciences*

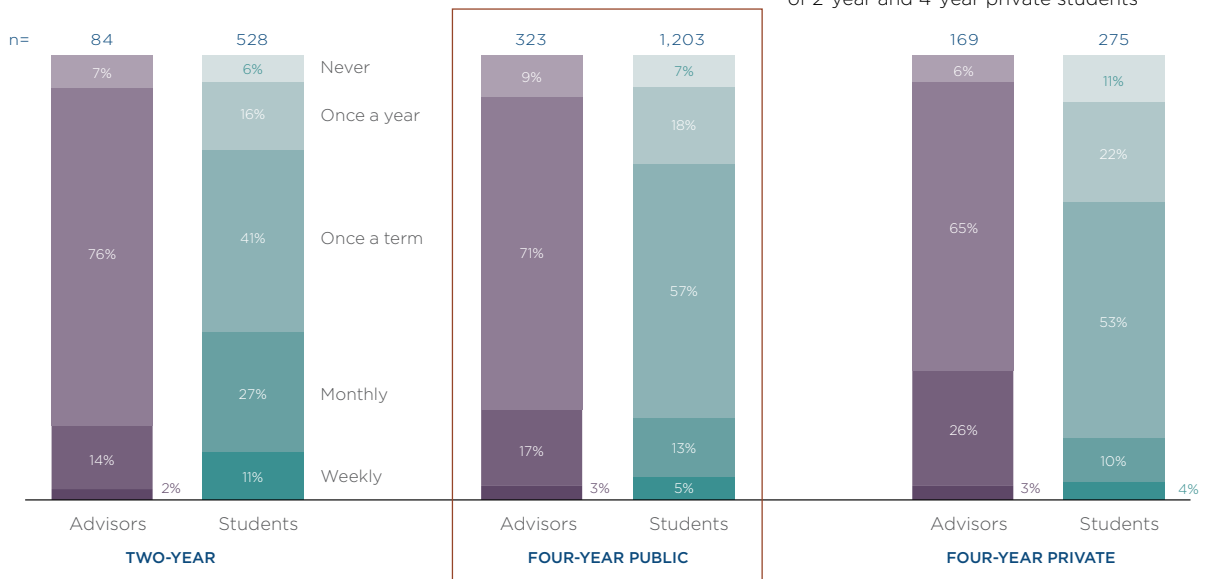
Despite the importance of student support awareness and advisor interactions to belonging, we find critical mismatches in student and advisor/institutional perspectives on advising.

For example, the frequency and length of advising appointments depend on who you ask. Advisors are most likely to say they meet with students once a term, whereas students report a much broader range of appointment frequency. Students at four-year public institutions report less frequent meetings with academic advisors alongside less prevalent mandatory advising policies. During appointments, advisors report longer appointments than students at all types of institutions, potentially due to considerations of preparation and follow-up activities. In *Driving Toward a Degree 2023*, a high caseload emerged as the #1 barrier to effective advising across institutions. Student perception of advisor appointment frequency and length suggests caseload impacts quantity as well as quality of advising.

Figure 16:  
Appointment frequency by sector

Notes: Survey questions: "For the students in your caseload you speak with, how many times a year do you speak with each student on average?", Faculty and professional advisor n = 660; Student survey question: "How many times a year do you meet with your

Only 20% of 4-year public students report meetings are mandatory compared to 37% of 2-year and 4-year private students

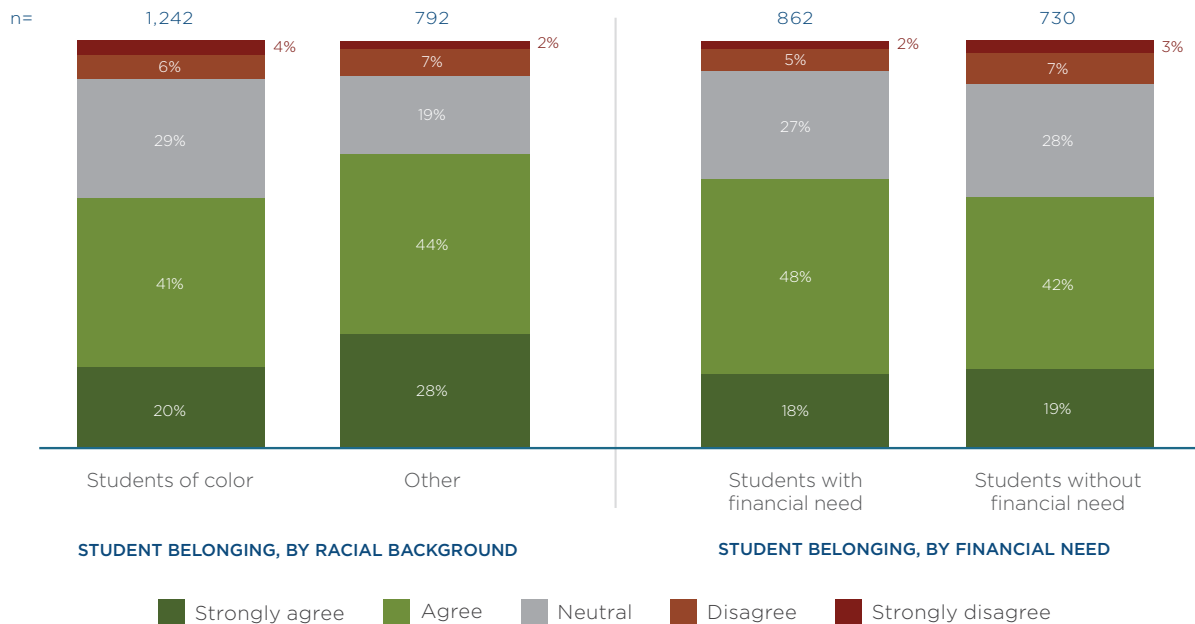


academic advisor?", Students with an advisor n = 2,006  
Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2023*, Tyton Partners analysis

A second mismatch is the extent to which academic advisors are knowledgeable about student life experiences. Among student survey respondents from both 2-year and 4-year institutions, 60% of students of color report feeling like they belong, whereas nearly 75% of white students report the same (see Figure 17). This gap in belonging reflects what we see in student outcomes: significant gaps in retention and degree attainment among students of color and white students.<sup>7</sup>

Figure 17:

### Student self-reported belonging by race/ethnicity and financial need



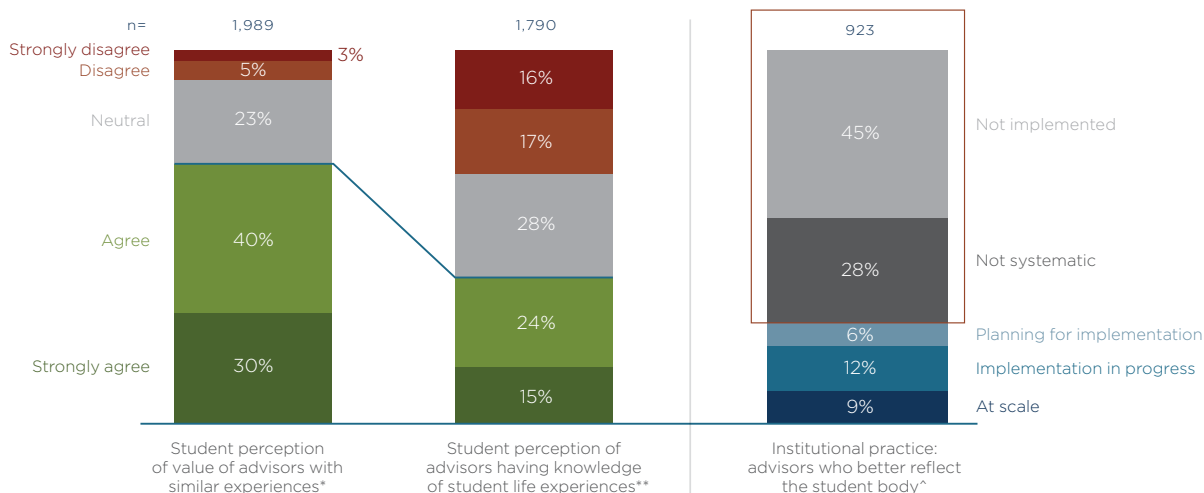
Notes: Survey question: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? I feel like I belong at my school"; "Don't know / NA" responses are excluded  
Sources: Time for Class / Driving Toward a Degree Student Survey 2023, Tyton Partners analysis

One advising practice that can impact this gap in belonging and outcomes is assigning advisors who better reflect the demographics of its student body. In fact, Figure 18 shows that most students (70%) value representative diversity among advisors, while only about 30% of institutions report implementing this practice systematically.

7. U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, U.S. Census of Population: 1960, Vol. I, Part 1; J.K. Folger and C.B. Nam, Education of the American Population (1960 Census Monograph); Current Population Reports, Series P-20, various years; and Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement, selected years, 1970 through 2021. (This table was prepared November 2021.) [nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21\\_104.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_104.10.asp)

Figure 18:

### Representation of lived experience matters



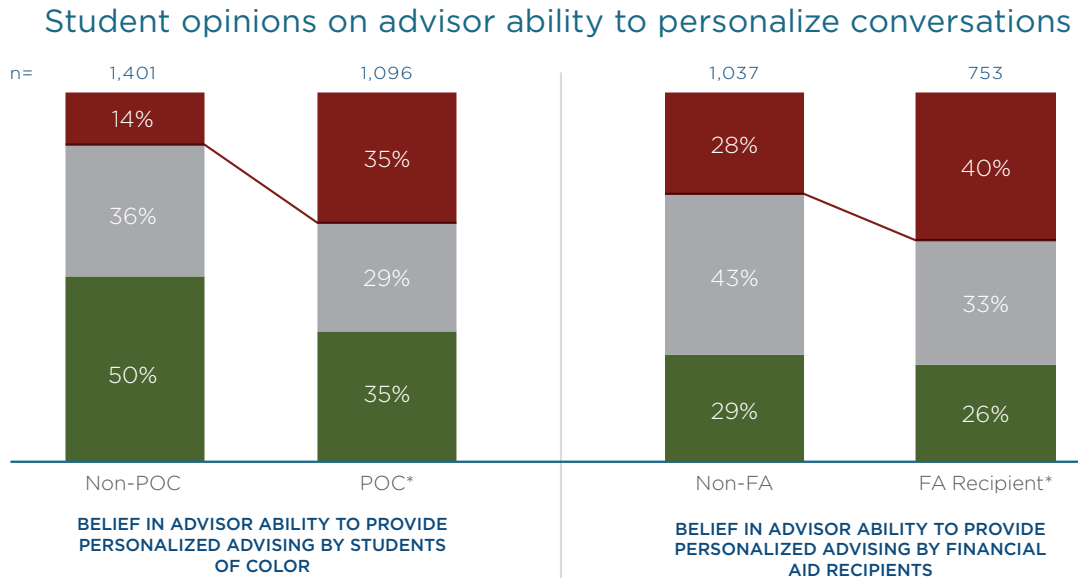
Notes: Survey questions: *\*\*"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: It's important to me that my school has counselors and advisors that represent my life experiences?"*; *\*\*\*"My advisor knows enough about my life experiences (e.g., race / ethnicity, first-generation student, veteran status) to provide personalized advice and options."*; *^"Please assess the degree to which your institution implements these academic advising policies and practices."*

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Tyton Partners analysis*

Less than half of students perceive their advisors as having sufficient knowledge of their life experiences (e.g., race/ethnicity, first-generation student, veteran status) to provide personalized advising. Black and Hispanic students and students with financial need are more likely to desire faculty, advisors, and counselors who represent their life experiences. These student groups are also less likely to perceive their advisors as equipped for personalized advising. As institutions strive to improve belonging and associated student outcomes, it is imperative that students, particularly Black, Hispanic, and students with financial need, have advisors and faculty that reflect their life experiences. ***Driving Toward a Degree 2023*** recommends institutions accomplish this through targeted recruitment efforts as well as high-impact retention practices such as scaled pay/career progression.



Figure 19:



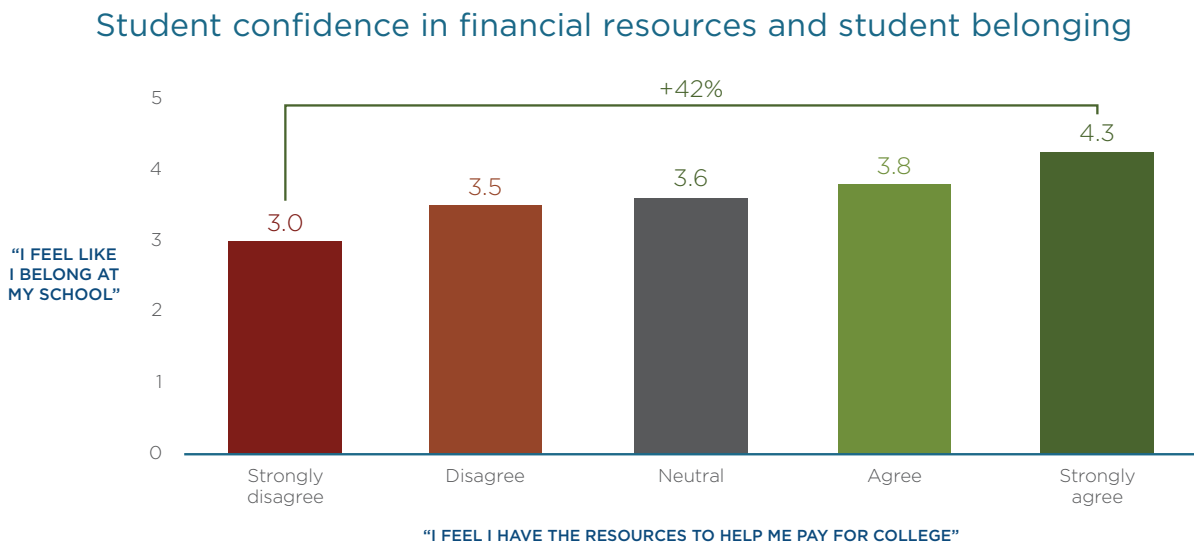
Notes: Survey question: “My advisor knows enough about my life experiences (e.g., race / ethnicity, first-generation student, veteran status) to provide personalized advice and options”; \*POC = person of color, defined here as any student that selected a non-white race/ethnicity; “Which of the following applies to you? Select all that apply. Receiving financial aid.” Total n = 1,790

Sources: Time for Class / Driving Toward a Degree 2023 Student Survey, Tyton Partners analysis

## BELONGING AND FINANCIAL AID

Students’ sense of belonging is also directly connected to their perceived ability to pay for college. Students who agree or strongly agree that they have “the resources to help pay for my college” were more likely to agree that they feel like they belong at their school (see Figure 20).

Figure 20:



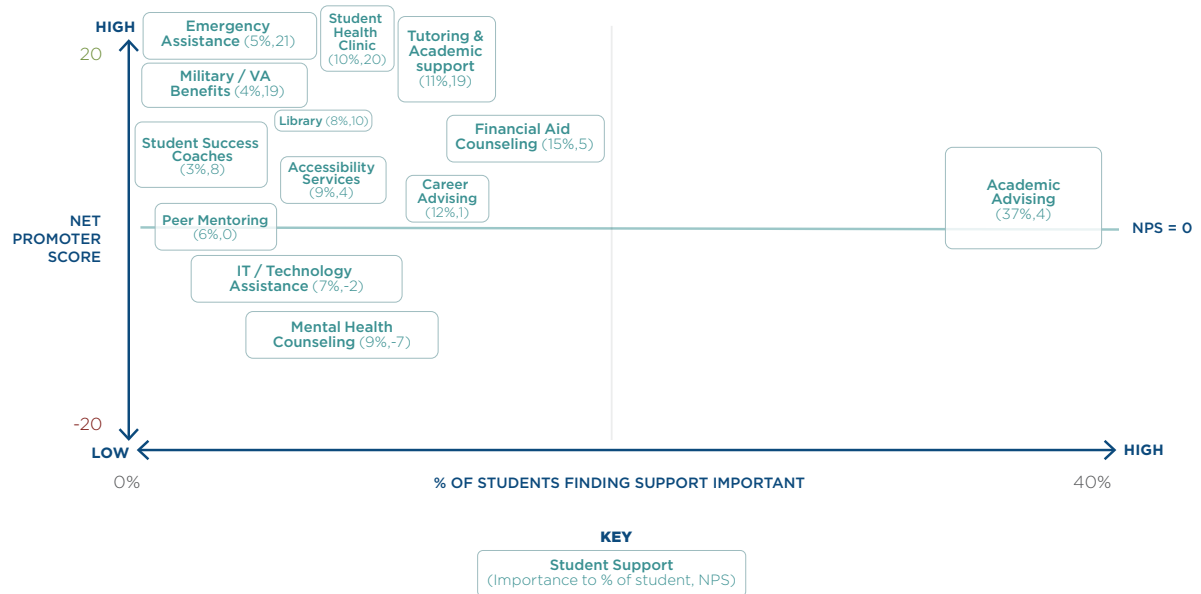
Notes: Survey questions: “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? I feel like I belong at my school”; “Which of the following support services are available to you at your institution? Select all that apply (14 options provided)”, student n=2,056

Sources: Time for Class / Driving Toward a Degree 2023 Student Survey, Tyton Partners analysis

In fact, financial aid counseling services received one of the highest net promoter scores among students and were cited as one of the most important services to students' decisions to re-enroll, second only to academic advising (see Figure 21).

Figure 21:

### Student reported importance and NPS of support services

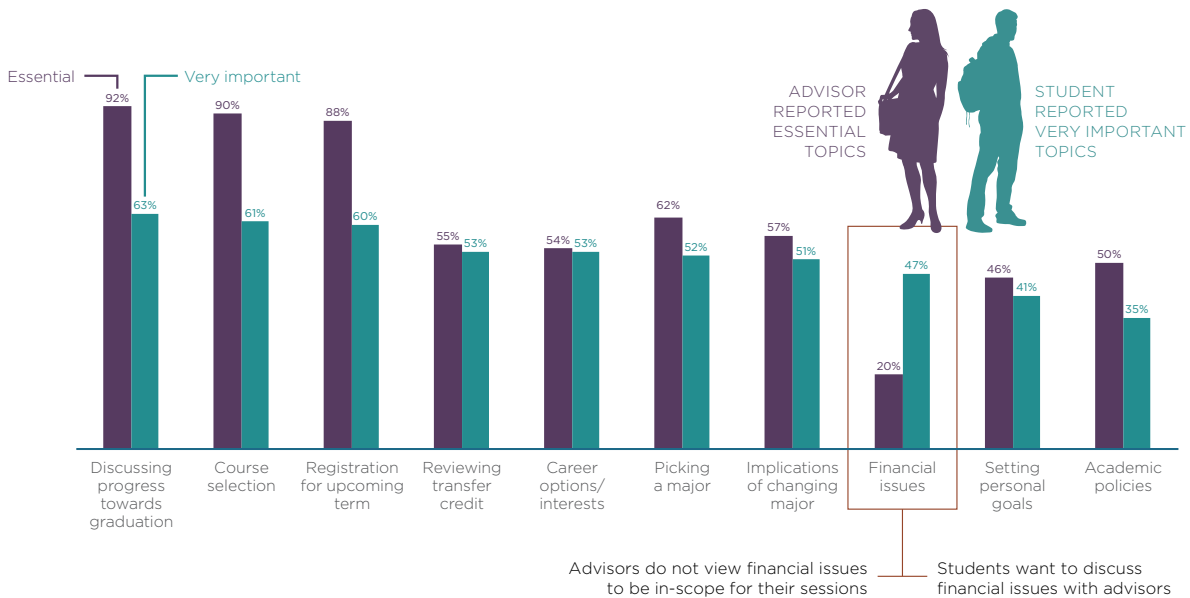


Notes: Survey questions: "How important are the following support services to your decision to re-enroll next term?"  
 n = 2,056; Students who indicated support as "important" or "very important" to retention included  
 Sources: Time for Class / Driving Toward a Degree Student Survey 2023, Tyton Partners analysis

But not all students are aware of financial aid services, and these students often have concerns not directly addressed by the financial aid office. One key area of misalignment between students and their academic advisors is financial issues – nearly half of the students view financial issues as very important to discuss with their advisors, but very few advisors see the topic as essential, likely given there are dedicated financial aid counselors at most institutions.

Figure 22:

## Student and advisor perspectives on important topics to cover



Notes: Survey question: “Advisor meetings can cover a variety of topics. Please indicate whether you think the following topics are important or not important for you to discuss with your advisor (regardless of whether you actually cover the topics).” Students with academic advisors n = 2,011; “Advisor meetings can cover a variety of topics. Please indicate whether you think the following topics are important or not important for you to discuss with your caseload. Essential - I cover in most of my student meetings. Nice to have, but not essential. Non-essential, I don’t see it as part of my role.” Faculty and professional advisor n=660

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2023*, *Time for Class / Driving Toward a Degree 2023 Student Survey*, Tyton Partners analysis

Student open-ended responses credit their advisors with helping them find ways to pay for college, indicating some advisors play an active role in financial counseling as well as course selection and registration.

### STUDENT QUOTES: WHAT DID YOU LEARN (IF ANYTHING) FROM YOUR ADVISOR?

**“[I have learned from my advisor...] how to manage my schedule and financial aid program”**

- First-year, male student of color, 2-year institution

**“[I have learned from my advisor...] how to better pick out some classes so that I can hit multiple areas with less classes and save money and time”**

- First-year, male student of color, 2-year institution

**“[I have learned from my advisor...] what credits (and costs) count for my graduation.”**

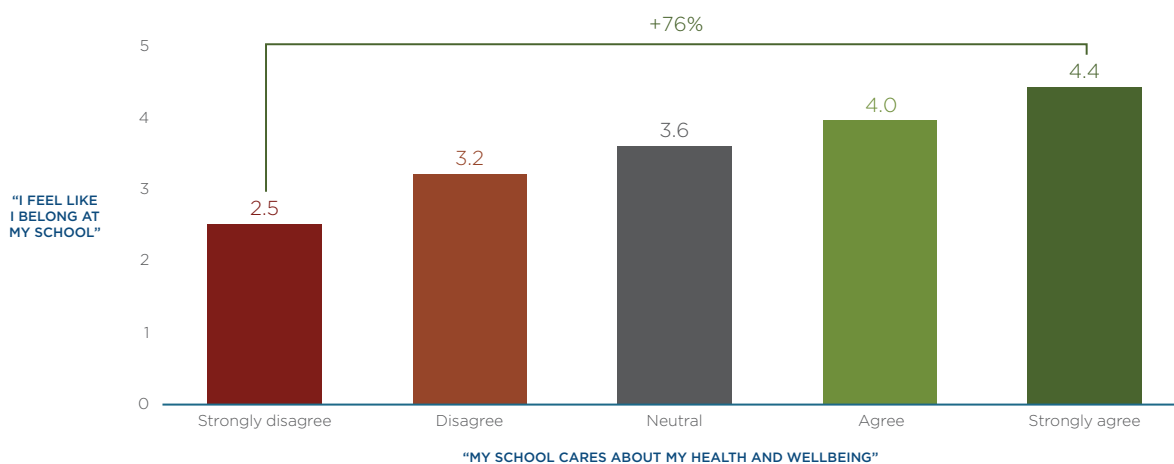
- First-year, male student of color, 4-year private institution

## BELONGING AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Last, but certainly not least, student belonging is also associated with students' comfort in having conversations with advisors and faculty about their mental health (see Figure 23). This relationship is even stronger among students who believe their school “cares about their health and wellbeing.”

Figure 23:

### Student belief that their institution cares about their wellbeing and student belonging



Notes: Survey question: Sources: *Time for Class / Driving Toward a Degree 2023 Student Survey*, Tyton Partners analysis  
“To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?”,  $n = 2,056$ , “Don’t know / NA” responses are excluded

What mental health services practices are effective? Institutions that have closed outcome gaps for students of color are more likely to cite mental health training for the whole campus community as a high-impact practice where faculty, staff, and advisors are equipped to engage with students on topics related to mental health. Less than half of student respondents feel comfortable having conversations with their advisors about their mental health. Yet, when asked in an open-ended survey question what they’ve learned from their advisor, a significant portion cited lessons learned related to mental health and self-management, suggesting that those advisors who engage in the topic have a positive impact.

## STUDENT QUOTES: WHAT DID YOU LEARN (IF ANYTHING) FROM YOUR ADVISOR?

---

**“[I have learned from my advisor...] that it’s okay to struggle but to pick myself up at the end”**

–24-year-old female, biology major receiving financial aid and attending 4-year private institution

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**“[I have learned from my advisor...] to put my mental health first”**

– Female, Hispanic/Latino majoring in Latin American studies at 4-year public institution

**“[I have learned from my advisor...] that if I need help with something, I must go out and get it. I shouldn’t expect help to come to me.”**

- Female, Black, financial-aid recipient majoring in theater studies at 4-year private institution

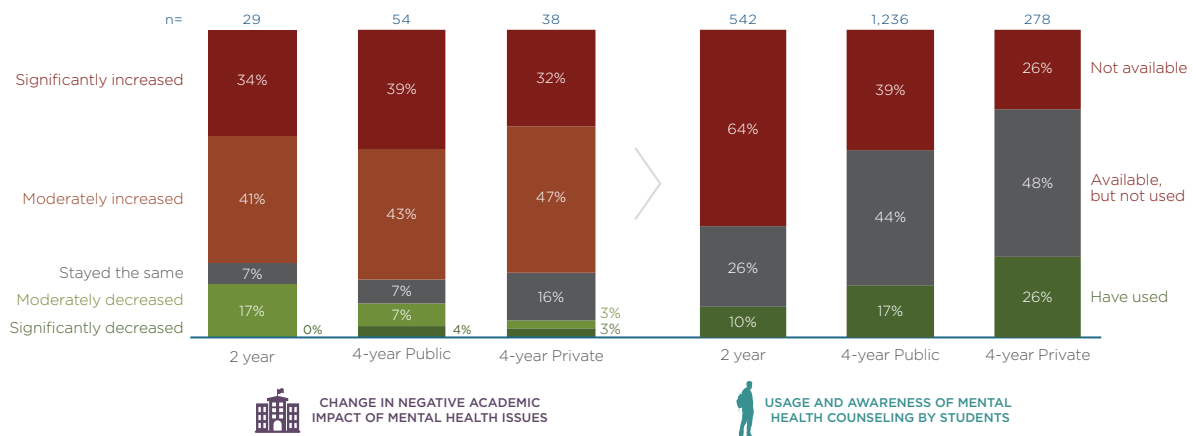
**“[I have learned from my advisor...] to be more compassionate and less hard on myself and truly enjoy the college experience”**

- Female, Hispanic/Latino, communications major from a working-class family at 4-year private institution

Institutions overwhelmingly agree that the negative impact of mental health-related issues on academic outcomes has increased over the past three years, but significantly, usage and awareness among students remains low (<30% have used) and particularly low at 2-year institutions where 64% of students say mental health counseling is not available. Overall, student reports of mental health counseling availability (54%) do not match with institution reports (91%). This trend is most severe at 2-year institutions where 82% of institutions cite availability and 36% of students indicate awareness.

Figure 24:

### Academic impact of mental-health issues, awareness, and usage of mental-health counseling



Notes: Survey questions: “How has the magnitude of negative academic impact of mental health-related issues changed over the past three years at your institution?”; “Which of the following support services are available to you at your institution?”; “Which of the following support providers have you ever personally interacted with at your current institution?”, n=2,056

Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Time for Class / Driving Toward a Degree 2023 Student Survey, Tyton Partners analysis

Awareness, Belonging, and Coordination are the ABCs of student support services that we believe are key to serving students outside of the classroom. We recognize that each institution has its own culture, capacity, and resources to address some of the disconnects we call out in this report juxtaposing student and institutional perspectives. However, several cross-cutting challenges merit attention from all parties invested in postsecondary student success.

Student awareness and usage of student support services is positively correlated with a sense of belonging, but only half of students report awareness of services that are nearly universally available at institutions. Institutions must shift to proactive and targeted communications to effectively reach students most in need of student support services. Physical and digital co-location – and associated coordination – of support services also show evidence of increased levels of awareness among students.

Students overwhelmingly identify academic advising as critical to retention. Yet, most students do not see their advisors as having sufficient knowledge of their life experiences to provide personalized advising. Black, Hispanic, and students with financial need feel this most acutely. Representation matters among advisors as personalized advising contributes directly to students' sense of belonging. Institutions and funders alike should focus on how to better recruit, retain, and equip advisors from diverse backgrounds.

Financial issues and mental health concerns persist among this year's student respondents as critical areas of disconnect between students and institutions. Students expressed a desire for academic advising to cover financial issues whereas academic advisors do not see this as within their purview. Students, particularly those at 2-year institutions, lack awareness of available mental health supports and report low levels of utilization despite institution reports of availability. Institutions and governing bodies should move to greater cross-training and coordination of student support services.

## CONCLUSION

Though colleges and universities define student success in many ways, research shows that student belonging has a positive impact on nearly all of them – both in and outside the classroom. To that end, this year’s research involving over 2,000 students and 4,000 instructors, advisors, and administrators found that using evidence-based teaching practices and digital tools in courses and higher awareness and utilization of student support services are linked to increased student belonging.

We urge institutions to consider these findings in the context of the larger body of research on belonging and student success and

- Provide instructors with course design support and effective training to increase the consistent and transparent use of evidence-based teaching practices,
- Invest in thoughtful and forward-looking integration of study aids, collaboration tools, and other digital learning tools into instruction which build community,
- Actively communicate the availability of support services to learners throughout the school year to drive awareness and utilization of those supports (taking into account targeted messaging and channel preferences),
- Where possible, physically and digitally co-locate student support services for increased integration of services and heightened learner awareness,
- Empower support providers with the right tools to integrate data and services in pursuit of holistic advising efforts, and
- Work to create representative diversity on student support teams.

# SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Listening to Learners is part of a series of national, longitudinal surveys of over 6,000 higher education students, advisors, faculty, and administrators that includes Time for Class and Driving Toward a Degree. Three different surveys were designed to evaluate the use of digital learning tools in the classroom, and the state of student support services – academic advising in particular – at higher education institutions across the United States and identify barriers to access and success for all students.

For this year’s study, advisors, faculty, administrators, and students received online surveys ranging from 10 to 40 minutes (depending on their individual roles) in March of 2023. We collected responses from approximately 4,000 institutional stakeholders at close to 1,500 unique postsecondary institutions and over 2,000 students from both two- and four-year private and public institutions.

Figure 25:

## Overview of three national surveys fielded in Spring 2023

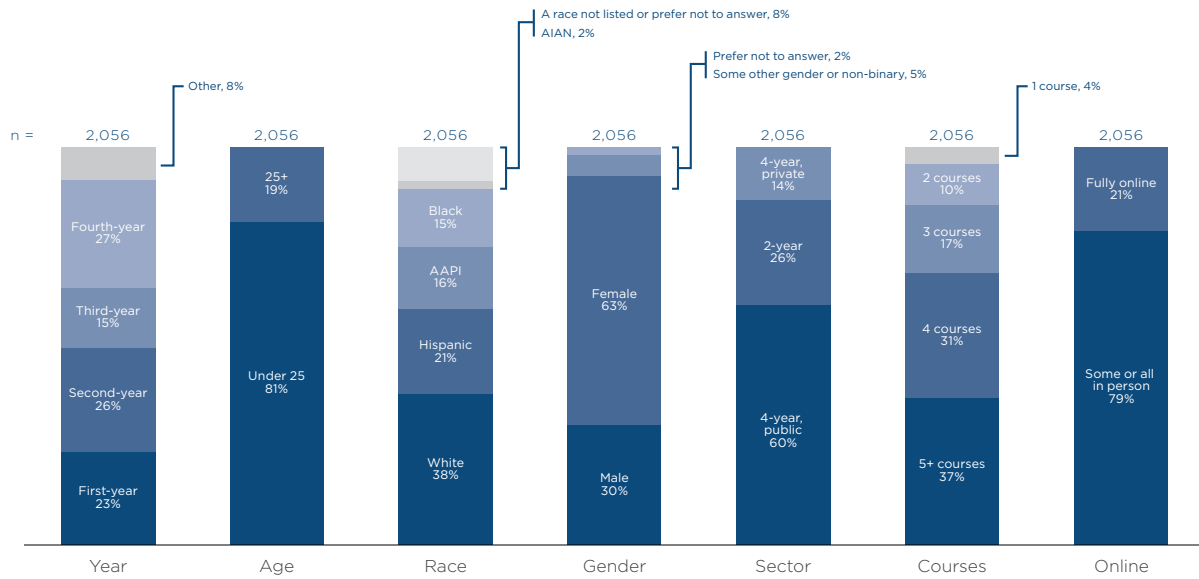
	TIME FOR CLASS ADMINISTRATOR	TIME FOR CLASS FACULTY	DRIVING TOWARD A DEGREE	FOUR-YEAR STUDENT	COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT
Qualified completes	306	1,748	1,725	1,514	542
TIME TO COMPLETE	26 mins	38 mins	29 mins	11 mins	7 mins

Source: Time for Class 2023 Surveys

This year’s survey gathered responses from a representative set of advisors, administrators, faculty, and students nationwide in terms of region, age, race, gender, and other collected demographic information. Because not all questions were presented to every respondent, response numbers vary by segment. Due to rounding, percentages may sum slightly more or less than 100%.

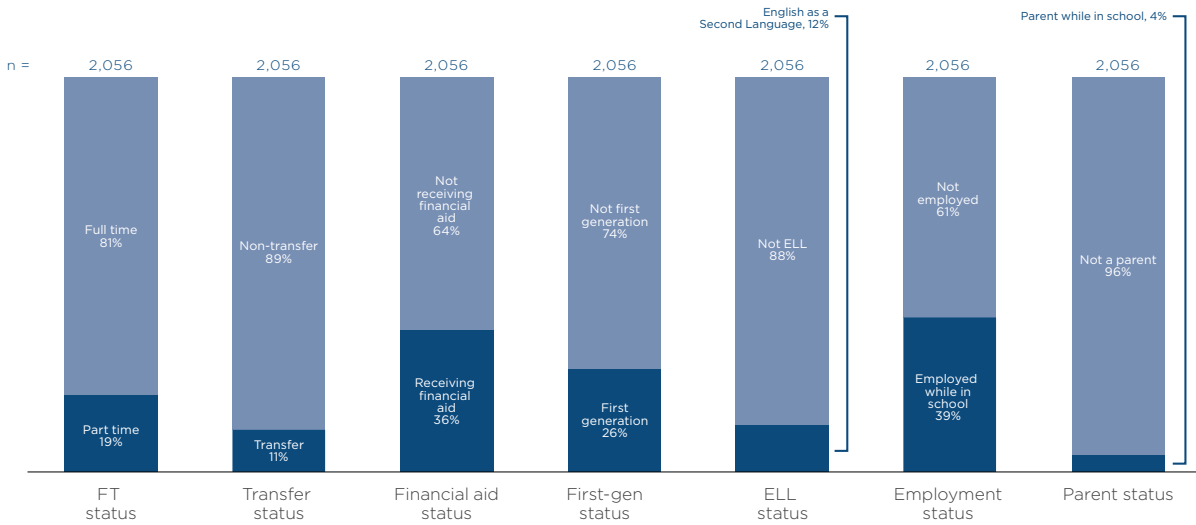


Figure 26:  
Overview of student survey respondent demographics



Sources: Time for Class Student Survey 2023, Tyton Partners analysis

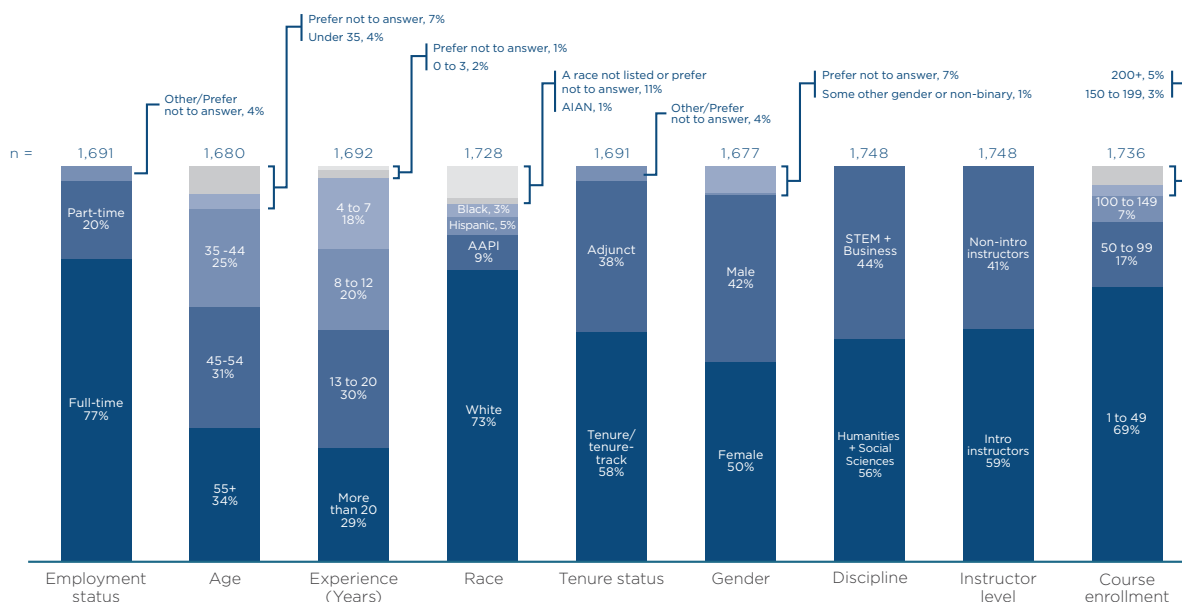
Figure 27:  
Student survey respondent profile



Notes: International students make up 3% of responses; Active and veteran military make up 1% of responses; all data is self-reported  
Sources: Time for Class Student Survey 2023, Tyton Partners analysis

Figure 28:

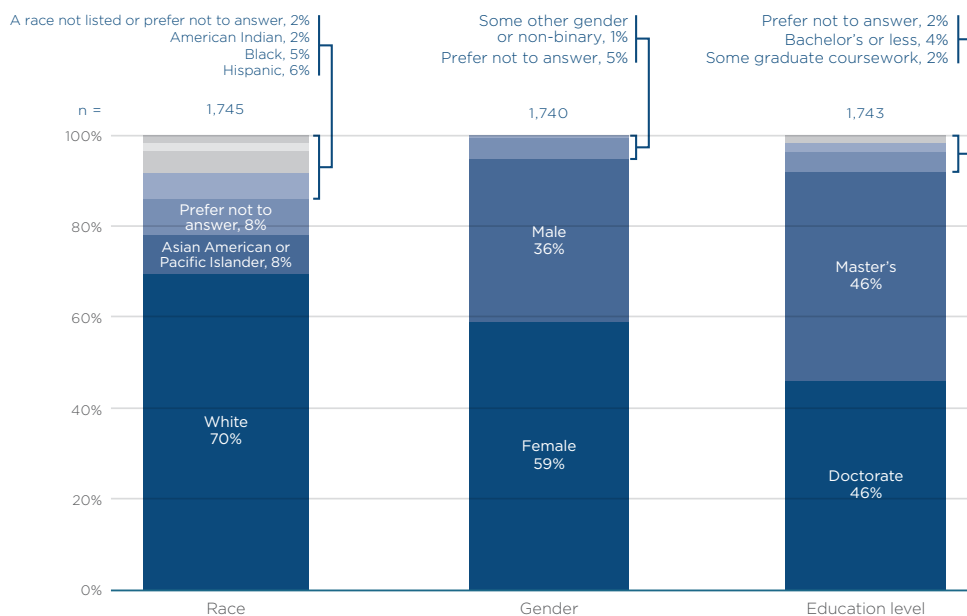
### Instructor survey respondent demographics



Sources: Time for Class Instructor Survey 2023, NCES, Tyton Partners analysis

Figure 29:

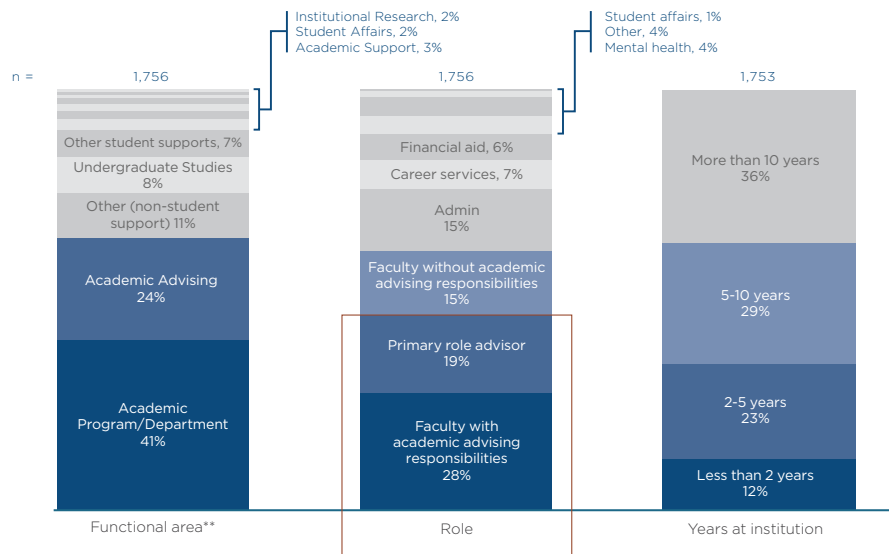
### Advisor/Administrator survey respondent demographics



Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Tyton Partners analysis

Figure 30:

### Advisor/Administrator survey respondent profile



Notes: Academic advisors include faculty with academic advising responsibilities and primary role advisors; Functional areas with less than 2% of respondents were excluded

Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Tyton Partners analysis

Based on the entire response set, the 95% confidence interval is +/- 2% for questions asked of advisors. Questions addressed to a smaller subset because of skip logic have wider confidence intervals. Generally, subgroups with samples smaller than 10 responses were discounted. As with all large-scale surveys, L2L has the potential for bias. It is possible that respondents willing to take the time to discuss their own experiences in higher education have stronger opinions than those who chose not to participate.

Figure 31:

### Student survey question to test evidence-based teaching practices

“Which of the following things did your instructor do in this course? Select all that apply.”

- Ask you to explain ideas in your own words through writing and discussion in class
- Send you personal messages about how you are doing in the course
- Ask classmates to review one another’s work with a set grading rubric
- Use low-stakes quizzes or other assessments frequently to make sure you are learning as you go through the course
- Assign projects with checkpoints or piece-meal items to complete
- Ask you to work in groups to solve problems
- Inform you on how to access institutional supports and services (e.g., tutoring center, technology help desk)

- Adjust syllabus and learning based on how you and your classmates perform on quizzes
- Use resources that go beyond textbooks such as real-world examples to illustrate course content
- Use polling tools to quickly understand group feelings and comprehension
- Incorporate flexibility around assignment deadlines or attendance
- None of the above

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our research would not be possible without our respondents – thank you to all the students, instructors, advisors, counselors, and administrators who so thoughtfully shared their experiences with the field to further elevate best practices in supporting student success.

This year, our research is funded by our anchor partners, *Anthology* and *Turnitin*. The work is also supported by *Macmillan*, *Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation*, *InsideTrack*, *Lumina Foundation*, *Every Learner Everywhere*, Stellic, and NACADA.

We are grateful for survey instrument review and advisement from *Dr. Karen Bussey*.

In addition, we'd like to thank our operational partners: *College Pulse* and *Centiment* for student survey outreach, Andy Sherman at *Can of Creative* for graphics and design support, and Jacqueline Renfrow for copyediting.

### EXAMPLES ARE NOT ENDORSEMENTS:

This document includes examples and resources for the reader's reference. The presence of these materials is not an endorsement of any expressed views, products, or services. The materials feature opinions and recommendations from different experts, along with hyperlinks and websites that belong to other public and private organizations.

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### CITING THIS RESOURCE

Shaw, C., Bhardwaj, R., Condon, K., NeJame, L., Martin, S., Rich, J., Janson, N., Bryant, G., and Fox, K. (2023, September). *Listening to Learners 2023*. Tyton Partners.